

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 19, 2012

Agenda Item: Turkey Augmentation in Chouteau County

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to trap wild turkeys from wild populations in Montana where damage complaints arise and relocate them to 19 miles of riparian habitat along the Missouri River between Fort Benton and Loma in Chouteau County. Birds will add to an existing population. The nearby Teton and Marias river drainages are contiguous with the Missouri River and birds there are expected to move along the entire corridor once populations are reestablished. Unlike cottonwood streams and rivers in much of the West, portions of this corridor have wheat and barley croplands. When food in winter becomes unavailable during periods of deep snow, turkeys will likely establish winter ranges in or near livestock feeding operations. Turkeys feeding in and around cattle feeding areas is typically not a problem when it occurs away from grain storage areas. If depredation does occur, the National Wild Turkey Federation offers funding to alleviate depredation problems (e.g., planting food plots to short-stop turkeys and mesh netting to cover bales). FWP will also assist landowners should problems arise.

Public Involvement & Results

FWP held meetings and numerous conversations with landowners in the project area. Complete consensus was reached among landowners to allow turkey augmentations in the area and to allow turkey hunting opportunities should a season become established in the future. Local Pheasants Forever Chapter representatives from Fort Benton were also present at meetings, also giving full support. Local National Wild Turkey Federation and Safari Club International representatives have also been involved in the process, showing full support for the project.

Alternatives and Analysis

- Proposed Action: FWP to trap wild turkeys from areas in Montana where turkey depredation complaints occur in central or eastern Montana and transplant them to the Missouri River between Fort Benton and Loma. FWP, landowners and NWTF would conduct trapping efforts should complaints occur. NWTF provides enclosed trailer and boxes for movement of birds to release area. It is not clear when these birds may become available. As such, this endorsement is proposed to for up to five years (through January 2017) and may include multiple releases.
- Alternative A - No Action: FWP would not be able offer landowners with depredation complaints elsewhere in central or eastern Montana the tool of removing problem turkeys where populations are above objectives. Present turkey populations along the Missouri River between Fort Benton and Loma would not receive the needed “boost” from augmentations to provide future hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in the area.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends approval by the FWP Commission to endorse turkey augmentation efforts in the Missouri River area between Fort Benton and Loma.

Proposed Motion

I move to endorse FWP’s recommendation to augment the turkey population in the Missouri River corridor between Fort Benton and Loma.